

## **Spatial Stories with Nomadic Narrators: Affect, Snapchat, and Feeling Embodiment in Youth Mobile Composing**

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**ABSTRACT:** While the vast majority of scholarship on mobile media, social semiotics, and multimodality highlights work done *behind* the screen, few studies have considered the embodied processes of youth composing *with* and *through* mobile technology. This study, drawn from a larger critical qualitative connective ethnography, works to fill a paucity of literature by examining how one youth participant, Ben, uses the digital mobile application Snapchat to create and compose a myriad of phenomenological experiences. By partnering approaches from queer phenomenology and multimodal (inter)action analysis, this paper illuminates how the affective intensities and push-and-pull of orientations deliver a narrative that is enfolded by several felt moments. By illuminating the rich processes of embodied composing with mobile media and accounting for the spatio-temporal scales and traversals that Ben navigates to architect his experience, this article works to spotlight how youth composers tell spatial stories and map nomadic narratives to explore their own embodied experiences with and through mobile media.

**Key words:** Composing, Mobile Media, Affect, Embodiment, Multimodality



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*“What is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a geography of thens and theres); and a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman.”*—Doreen Massey, *For Space*

*“Watching someone snap is like watching someone paint. It is the creative process. That is what I am talking about. This is my collective conscious on a map, stretched across a hundred frames or so, charting an experience.”*—Ben, Participant Interview

While lacing up his boot in preparation to brave the cold autumn day, Ben (all names of participants and institutions are pseudonyms), a youth participant with whom I worked and learned alongside, swiped his iPhone’s screen to enter a passcode and unlock his phone. With a click, tap, and swipe, Ben toggled between applications to check weather, reblog on his Tumblr dashboard, and tweet a Twitter follower and friend about an upcoming homework assignment. By the time he laced his other boot, Ben informed me that it may rain an hour later into the day, three users added comments to his reblog, and that his classmate confirmed that their calculus inquiry project was due on Tuesday. This short vignette, what some would conceive of as Ben’s mobile media use-in-progress, highlights a common scene for youth whose lives are increasingly mediated by digital technologies and virtual geographies.

For language and literacy studies, much like the opening scene highlighting Ben’s mobile media composing, space and time have recently retaken a place of primacy in the vast array of situated conceptions of meaning making (Compton-Lilly & Halverson, 2014). Despite this recentering, much of the scholarship focusing on the spatio-temporal dimensions of learning has occluded the affective and experiential pathways of composing (Lemke, 2013). Sedimented by the hyper-mediated digital world, this disavowal of affect and experience leaves the topography of literacies and learning across space and time with more cleavages. With the advent of new digital technologies and advanced communicative landscapes, youth, as we know, are living even more connective lives than before (Boyd, 2014). As such,

lives behind the screen are marked by an era known for its focus on the visual. Traditional folk distinctions plaguing research in language and literacy (online/offline, in-school/out-of-school) studies are becoming blurred and *feeling* the liminalities and spaces between these bifurcations is necessary.

While the vast majority of scholarship on social semiotics and multimodality highlights work done behind the screen, few studies have considered the embodied processes of youth composing *with* and *through* technology (for exemplar see Ehret & Hollett, 2014). This study, in line with the aforementioned research, works to fill a paucity of literature by examining how one youth participant, Ben, uses the digital mobile application Snapchat to (re)live, reexamine, and document a myriad of phenomenological experiences. The affective intensities and push-and-pull of orientations, I argue, deliver a narrative that is enfolded by several felt moments, moments that were not conceived of at the start of the production. By highlighting the rich processes of embodied composing, and accounting for the spatio-temporal scales and traversals that Ben navigates across, I work to illuminate how twenty-first century youth composers tell spatial stories and map nomadic narratives through mobile media. In sum, I offer the heuristic perspective of elastic literacies to analyze and document the practice of narrative cartography across three paths of complementarity: activity, spacetime, and affect/sensation.

This article is divided into four parts. In the opening section, I review and operationalize key constructs such as space, time, literacies, and composing. By partnering Ahmed (2006), Lemke (2013), Massey (2005), and Massumi (1995), I highlight how time is an affective component for space as it reorients the practice of composing new media narratives. I review previous conceptions of these constructs and operationalize what Lemke (2000) calls the *traversal* to examine the layering of composing across space-time configurations. After, I focus on a single case study of a youth with whom I worked and learned alongside using Snapchat as a tool for embodied composition. By charting three distinct spacetime traversals in his snapstory, it is my hope to strike a chord that highlights how youth use mobile

applications and digital technologies to tell spatial stories, ones that are layered in affective intensities and (re)orient the production of embodied spacetime.

Examining these spatial stories across one another, I interrogate affect, embodiment, and its intersection with the spatio-temporal dimensions of mobile media composing. Ben's story, I contend, is a rich one that illustrates the way youth use ephemeral media to recreate history/ies and remediated "me-s." As a narrator, Ben draws us into his experience by its affective intensities. He asks us to be a part of the performance rather than decode it from a periphery. As I will suggest throughout the sections that follow, both in broad brush strokes and in the minute details embedded within Ben's snapstory, language and literacy educators and researchers must be cognizant of the ways youth are using new media narratives to touch time, telling spatial stories and composing experience across a variety of spacetime traversals.

### **Snapchat, Social Semiotics, and Everyday Digital Photography**

The iPhone, a digital tool and pseudo-appendage for a multitudinous number of young people, is inherently a cartographic interface. Users select, download, and navigate across a myriad of mobile applications and tools on the device. The hybrid interface of the iPhone not only calls for navigation within the machine and across the screen, but it is also used to navigate the physical space surrounding the device. While there are a plethora of iOS and Android applications and mobile media tools used to chart cartographies of space, for the purposes of this article I focus on one in particular, Snapchat.

Seeing over 350 million photos shared every day, Snapchat is a photo-based mobile application for smart and iPhones. As an application whose youth appeal lies in its ephemeral status, Snapchat allows users to share their digital stories with others for an allocated amount of time (from one to ten seconds); or to create a narrative stream or snapstory lasting for longer periods of time. Linking photos and videos into a temporal stream of images, each snap is stitched together to last for 24 hours. As a digital composing tool, Snapchat combines and processes meta-data to act as a sensor. Ethnographically linking space, time,

and temperature, Snapchat is a medium that produces perception. Thus, with the affordances of the application, youth users are becoming nomadic narrators to tell temporal tales.

Snapchat, in comparison to other mobile applications and/or devices, allows for a type of techno-embodied composition not previously seen. Previous studies of youth mobile composing have traditionally focused on how youth use the affordances of video, digital photography, and/or text-based messaging to (re)author/remix selves (Jocson, 2013; Lam, 2009; Saul, 2014; Vasudevan, 2006; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010). Comparatively, Snapchat is an application whose emergent composing process and storytelling features become crystallized in the semiotic activity of tracing experiential events, not products. Snapstories beg to be read as textual and affective assemblages unfolding.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

#### **Stretchy Selves and Spatial Stories: On "Feeling" Space**

Mobile applications and digital tools for composing new media narratives stretch across affective planes of scale (Lemke, 2000). Whether residing in the mundane or memorializing an event, Snapchat is a mobile application used by users to "feel" space and place through composing. As the application of primacy in this project, and a digital tool that works to tell spatial stories, it is worth spending some time here to operationalize how I define space and place. Like the opening epigraph, I draw on Massey (2005) to describe the "throwntogetherness" (p. 140) of negotiation and navigation. Conceptualizing place as an entanglement, the situative nature for language and literacy studies becomes blurred when observing composing *in situ* across mobile planes. Just as Leander and Boldt (2013) argue, literacies are not bounded a priori. Youth are not solely working as multimodal designers, documenting and designing the physical space and geographies they traverse and compose through (a tenet often cited in the multiliteracies framework by the New London Group, 1996), but rather they are following "the emergence of activity" (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 34) where their bodies are pushed-and-pulled by affective intensities

of the relations they are a part of. For Snapchat users, people and objects become contexts for one another. Ever feeling, ever fleeting, youth stretch themselves across these affective intensities to (re)author selves.

Affect is the drag individuals feel—the push-and-pull of narrative cartography—as they compose across the techno-writing assemblage of Snapchat. Drawing from Lemke (2013), I describe affect as “how feelings interact with meanings as we live our lives across places and times, being and becoming the persons we are moment to moment across longer timescales” (p. 64). Similarly, affect and the selves we convey through spatial storytelling have much to do with our own senses of selves and identities. Taking a post-structuralist stance, I contend that the forces or affective intensities between bodies, contract and collide to make emergent instantiations of identity/ies work. “Our identity-in-the moment” as Lemke (2013) has posited, “need not coherently cumulate into a single longer term identity” (p. 64). “Identities can be multiplex, strategic, logically inconsistent or incommensurable, and call for quite different conceptualizations when considered at different timescales” (Lemke, 2013, p. 64). Hence, it is through the composing practice of snapping, I argue, that youth stretch themselves across an array of spatio-temporal dimensions to (re)author selves.

Space, like affect and place in particular, takes on a perspective of orientation. Drawing from Ahmed’s (2006) book *Queer Phenomenology*, space becomes a “question of ‘turning’ of directions taken, which not only allow things to appear but also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things” (p. 6). Hence, the meandering across the throwtogetherness of narrative place is affectively propelled to take on new (re)orientations, to fall within the entanglements of time, and to take-on new stories, ones which may not have crystallized in the original plan. Youth users, hence, become spatial architects of experience (see Figure 1).

### Techno-Embodiment, Queer Orientations, and Touching Time

Although space, place, and affect are theoretical constructs that ground the navigation of users as they

compose with Snapchat, temporality cuts across to chart a constellation of embodied composing across time. Particularly, I find it useful to demarcate and splice these spatial stories by what Lemke (2013) defines as traversals; or the “trajectory through space and time, real and virtual or both, that crosses boundaries of place, setting, activity, genre, and the like” (p. 65). In taking on a phenomenological orientation to users feeling affective intensities as they compose, I argue that technology does not solely become a tool, but rather an extension of self. Technology, echoing Ahmed (2006), “does not simply refer to objects that we use to extend capacities for action” (p. 45) but instead becomes “the process of ‘bringing forth’ or ... to make something appear, within what is present” (p. 46). Thus, the techno-embodiment of youth mobile composing takes on a queer orientation as it navigates both space and place.

#### Affect and/or affective intensities

Affect may be described as the change in orientation/network when corporeal bodies come into contact with one another. Affective intensities are the push-and-pull between bodies through their contact, elision, and/or collision. Affective intensities often are sites of new expression and quality.

#### Assemblage

A complex configuration of networked elements and/or human and non-human objects. A city, for example, could be read as an assemblage insofar as it is composed of a people/population, roads, government policies, social movements, and slogans/signs.

#### Embodiment

An expression of the present. A corporeal and affective reworking of the content of social worlds. Embodiment “involves a capacity to take up and to transform features of the mundane world in order to portray a ‘way of being’, an outlook, a style of life that shows itself in what it is” (Thift, 2008 cf. Radley, 1996).

#### Rhizome / rhizomatic

“The rhizome is any network of things brought into contact with one another, functioning as an assemblage machine for new affects, new concepts, new bodies, new thoughts” (Colman, 2005, p. 232). The mapping of these rhizome networks and affective intensities could be classified as rhizomatic, each residing on the same plane of immanence.

#### Scale/s

Units / systems of model and organization that represent interactions across topologies such as space, time, etc. “Each scale of organization in an ecosocial system is an integration of faster, more local processes...into longer-timescale, more global or extended networks (Lemke, 2000, p. 275).

#### Social semiotics

A tradition of inquiry, drawing from Halliday (1978), Hodge and Kress (1988), interested in the social dimensions of meanings in any medium of communication, its production, interpretation and circulation, and its cause and effect in social processes.

#### Spacetime

Highlighting the multiplicities and heterogeneities of both space and time, spacetime imagines the “simultaneity of stories so far” (Massey, 2005) as they pertain to place making.

#### Traversals

Pathways of making meaning across boundaries of sites, genres, contexts, institutions. Traversals may, and often do, extend across scales.

Figure 1: Glossary

Users across Snapchat “touch” time to tell stories. Both physically, by tapping and clicking buttons on screens with fingers to chart how long a particular frame will last on the ephemeral mobile application, and affectively, by being propelled across spacetime to compose frames for representation, simulation, and perception, Snapchat is a techno-embodied practice whose dual narrative possibility falls across spatial and temporal domains. I highlight its techno-embodied qualities so as not to pronounce it a wholly liberatory application for composing. Snapchat, embodied as it may be, does not function solely as an opening of vision and storytelling. Through its mobile screen perspective it also serves as a shield or blinder, limiting our views within more novel modes of techno-composing.

### Elastic Literacies and Stretches of Selves

In an effort to not discount these energetic and affective moments for youth, I am offering the term *elastic literacies*. Drawing from Wang’s (2013) theory of the elastic self, elastic literacies take into account the types of practices that emerge from relational social ties and interactions with human and nonhuman actors across an array of environments. The elastic self is “characterized by the feeling that one’s identity is malleable and involves the trying on of different identities that are beyond the realm of what would be considered normal displays of one’s prescribed self” (Wang, 2013, p. 31). Wang has further argued that “... the more elastic one’s identity, the more capacity one has to engage with one’s social surroundings, to react to unfamiliar people and situations, and to reflexively incorporate the new interactions into their own personal narrative” (p. 31). Rhizomatic in nature, elastic literacies, in comparison to multiliteracies, are more malleable and creatively charged. They are less design-focused and more experimental. Elastic literacies work to “trace resonance” (Stornaiuolo & Hall, 2014, p. 37) across a number of literacy sitings.

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Elastic literacies stretch across three “paths of complementarity” (Kress, 2011, p. 246). I draw on Kress (2011) here to suggest that seemingly incommensurable orientations into meaning making and composing may in fact render greater analyses into the specialized insights of each of these three intersecting and overlapping approaches. The first path considers the mediating activity, in our case a young person composing with a mobile application on his iPhone. Taking into account the varying scales (Lemke, 2000) of the ecosocial system youth traverse in all activity, the second path accounts for the spatio-temporal traversals of mediated action. The third path that elastic literacies accounts for is the affective, the diagonal that cuts across activity and scale to account for how affective intensities of

enfolding make the practice, action, and reception motile. Deleuze (1988/2012) accounts for this elasticity as inflection, the genetic element of the action/line, which is the point of the movement. Movement, for Deleuze (1981/2002), “is not explained by sensation, but by the elasticity of sensation, its *vis elastic*” (p. 45). Elastic literacies, hence, is the growing together activated through the improvisation of the relational, not merely the coming together of two subjectivities but the novelty of experience and expression. Elastic literacies take into account the way contemporary youth use, feel, and experience specific types of practice to maneuver between selves.

Conceptually, elastic literacies is a heuristic perspective that accounts for how the emerging landscapes and digital geographies of new media technologies, and available communicative practices shape identity and its relationship to new imaginings of literacy practice(s). I describe it as a heuristic insofar as it serves not only an explanatory function but also traces the tensions and resonances between systems of representation and real time (inter)actions among and between social actors. Rather than solely seeing practice as mediated by actor and a tool, elastic

literacies account for a range of spacetime traversals and affective motilities. Elastic literacies ask us to consider movement and navigation across practice as a fluid assemblage, operating always in between the constraints and limits of composing but taking heed of experiential improvisation.

By focusing on a particular snapstory of Ben's (a youth with whom I worked and learned alongside in a larger study) as my unit of analysis, I first adopt a critical sociocultural perspective to explore Snapchat as a composing process, one wherein the body is traced across multiple ecosocial scales (Lemke, 2000). Utilizing a sociocultural approach explicates "the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural institutions and historical situations in which this action occurs, on the other" (Wertsch, 1995). As youth work to continuously reauthor selves, the activities remediating personal histories, creations and compositions, and trajectories of material embodiment are at once enabled but also constrained by the cultural tools employed (Shipka, 2011; Wertsch, 1998). Working to understand semiotic (re)mediation and the process of composing through a larger sociocultural network, I avoid common tensions in literacy studies concerning digital/virtual geographies by "looking at the technology as an addition to life" rather than "looking at life through that technology" (Bruce & Hogan, 1998, p. 270). However, and as I attend to in my heuristic perspective of elastic literacies, I am also cognizant of the affective experiences youth encounter as they compose. These intensities are not detailed or indexed by solely analyzing the action through a sociocultural perspective. For this reason, I consider Ben's snapstory encasing a milieu of elastic literacies practices. Analysis will be attentive to the complex processes that account for how bodies, minds, and institutions participate in the action, and subsequently, how they take shape from activities and experiences in which they are recruited.

### Impetus for Research Questions

This article, drawing on a single piece of data from a three-year longitudinal critical qualitative study, focuses on a singular rich point for analysis. The snapstory and narrative events analyzed in this article were selected from the larger corpus of data on the

basis that they offer unique insights regarding language, activity, and semiotic flexibility. In other words, it was a "telling" case (Mitchell, 1984, p. 239) for examining youth composing with mobile media. Microanalysis was done not to analyze this moment in the traditional sense, but to follow Leander and Boldt's (2013) invitation and consider "what is emergent" (p. 42) in this data? Thus, I work to address the following research questions:

1. How does one youth participant, Ben, use the digital application Snapchat as a tool for embodied composing? How do histories of participation and rememory orient him in his composing process?
2. How does Ben navigate spacetime traversals in the process of composing during this everyday literacy event? What affective intensities propel him to tell his spatial story? How does he navigate and touch time?

### Method

#### Toward a Connective Ethnographic Approach: Capturing Spatial Stories

Utilizing a networked design to trace actions across space and place, I use a connective ethnographic approach (Hine, 2000; 2015; Leander, 2008; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Leander & McKim, 2003) for both data collection and analysis. Data drawn for the article consists of a 46- minute video-recorded 1:1 multimodal (inter)action protocol analysis (Norris, 2011) of Ben producing an identity text, multiple active interviews ranging from 40 to 75 minutes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2002), participant observation, and field notes. As Snapchat is an ephemeral mobile application, with compositions deleting themselves after a 24-hour period, I used the mobile application Reflector, an AirPlay receiver, to mirror the snapstory from my iPhone to my desktop and record via QuickTime.

### Data Analysis

In the first phase of analysis, I used ChronoViz (Version 2.0.2.; Fouse, n. d.), a qualitative web-based tool that helps navigate time-coded data, to break down and segment the larger video-recorded protocol. ChronoViz helped facilitate splitting the

video and snapstory into larger frames (spatial stories) for analysis. Frames were triangulated with the actual “snaps” (segments of narrative) from Ben’s larger snapstory. Pieces of data were then co-constructed and situated spatially (digitally mapped by Ben’s movement and co-constructed on Google Earth), to better texture the narrative cartography and reenactment of lived experience. These think-aloud sessions and interviews were classified as “maker moments” (his word, not my own) as Ben and I worked collaboratively to retrace and stitch together the movement and stretches of narrative.

As a secondary phase of analysis, I returned to the video-based protocol of composing *in situ* to create a multimodal transcript that included not only speech but also descriptions of changes in gesture and movement. For the latter, I noted the sequence, timing, and position of each snap on Ben’s larger text and embodied composition. I referenced these changes in modal density in the multimodal transcript (see Figure 3). In the second phase of analysis, videos were reformatted without audio so that the focus was on embodied modes of interaction. Throughout the course of these analyses, I noticed Ben’s referent to the landscape, touching of the screen, and positioning of the figured audience as frequent modes of communication for technο-embodied composing. Gestural pointing and placing moves marked important shifts in activity. These shifts illuminate the traversals and broader themes in the findings section.

### About Ben

Throughout the larger three-year longitudinal qualitative study, Ben was an avid Snapchat user and digital composer. When this snapstory was collected, Ben was 17 years old and a junior at City Town high school, an affluent suburban school with an International Baccalaureate program. Having competing interests in linguistics, technology, and pop culture, Ben’s larger narratives on Snapchat were often layered with selfies, snapshots of homework, and/or video recordings of YouTube videos. While Ben considered himself an “only child now” as his older brother and sister were away at college, he took

on the role of “little brother” when his sister, Lizette, came home from college and participated with us in the collection of the snapstory. I highlight this interjection as Lizette becomes a central figure in Ben’s snapstory and elicits affective intensities that push him to create alternative compositions across spacetime traversals.

### Findings / Traversals

The creative practices and digital affordances of the Snapchat interface can be seen as an embodied tool for composition involving a myriad of queer affective entanglements of spacetime. In this section, I discern three different ways in which the broad concept of embodied composing becomes specific for Ben’s navigation and where tenets of performative cartography emerge across three traversals: navigation as touching and curating experience, as an affective moment and engagement of feeling rememory/ies, and as a haptic participatory project wherein histories and experiences collide.

Spacetime traversals are presented across themes, each unique and in response to the aforementioned research questions. “Touching Writing: Feeling Digital Composing and Creating Experience” explores Ben’s histories of participation and his mediated action using Snapchat as an embodied tool for composing. In particular, I analyze his spatial story *in situ* and use multimodal (inter)action analysis to read Ben as auteur. In “My Collective Life, My Consciousness: On Curating and Mapping Experience,” I explore the holistic design process embedded within Snapchat and Ben’s near 7-minute embodied snapstory. Pushed by an affective moment of rememory, Ben curates a memorialization of an event and relives it with a small collective of users (both virtual and in-person). In the third and final finding, “Like Sand Sculptures Blown Away in the Wind: Materiality, Felt Space, and Participating in Lizette’s Childhood,” I work to explore how Snapchat could be considered as an inherently queer practice. Both phenomenologically felt across geographies and space, Snapchat, I argue, is ephemerally reorienting the embodied present in the youth composing process.

### Spacetime Traversal 1. Touching Writing: Feeling Digital Composing and Creating Experience

As a Snapchat user, Ben was quick to use all facets of the mobile application to texture his narratives with incisive features detailing day, location, and sound. On this day, in particular, Ben, alongside his sister Lizette and me, went out to revisit a snapstory he had created earlier in the month. In a previous interview, Ben had noted that he often uses Snapchat to "... create shared experiences, to relive moments in my life that I wanted to share with other people but no one else was around." In this snapstory, more specifically, Ben was eager to compose and share a lived history of his "first kiss." However, on the day Ben and I met for a composing protocol analysis wherein I asked him to re-create this story, his narrative does not go as planned. In a near 7-minute snapstory, each frame lasting 7-10 seconds, Ben tells three spatial stories: his first kiss, a rewind to school in a micro-story he calls "Lizette's inner child," and the close or the story of feeling rememory (see Figure 2). While I will detail these spatial stories in later sections, I want to first discuss the act of "touching" composing and highlight through vignettes from the larger multimodal (inter)action analysis transcript how Snapchat is inherently an embodied process of composing.

As an application, Snapchat is a hybrid tool that requires users to touch, swipe, and tap to compose. Apart from these gestures and movements, users can also use Snapchat's hybrid affordances to detail the specifics of their narrative. For example, the last frame of Ben's snapstory indicates the temperature of the day he created it (59 degrees Fahrenheit). Apart from these minute details, what is important to note is the

way Ben uses text, audio, video, and paint features to detail objects and narrate events of the past. Take for instance the final three frames from Ben' first spatial story. In this 3-minute and 52-second narrative, Ben uses the final frames to highlight sites of interaction. In the third and fourth frames of Figure 2, we see Ben use paint to draw in particulars of the situation. Next to his face we see where the kiss happened, illustrated by the red paint. Following, we see him narrate and physically draw in a bench that used to line the back of the elementary school playground. An artifact that would provide warrant for a story he later tells. Finally, and as way to transition to the overlapping spatial story, a 10-second frame is played with Ben swinging on a swing at the school's playground. Backdropped by the squeaking of the swing, Ben does not speak. Rather, the affective moment for Ben is the movement, the gaze of the screen that moves up to the sky and then back down to the woodchips that line the playground bed. Ben, using the particulars of Snapchat, literally creates a blueprint for the experience he wants viewers to have. Working to "create an experience" (according to Ben), Snapchat is used as a tool to compose and supplant pre-existing objects and histories into an unfolding narrative. In essence, Ben touches writing to feel and create experience.

**Touching writing and felt composing.** Apart from the formal features and affordances of composing on Snapchat, it is important to physically mark how composing *in situ* with the mobile application is operationalized as an embodied experience for youth users. Take, for instance, the 6-frame vignettes I included in Figure 3, a multimodal (inter)action analysis transcript that looks across gesture, body movement, and speech. In each frame we see Ben,



Figure 2. Ben's layered snapstory across time.

through his numerous histories of participation and expertise on Snapchat, mark his frame. Focusing on perspective, angle, approach, mode, and dialogue, Ben uses the application not only to convey message and meaning to his Snapchat audience but to also navigate physical space and surrounding geographies. For Ben, creating and curating his spatial story was of the utmost importance. He was consistent in arguing that he wanted it to be “real” just like the moment it occurred three years before. Although Snapchat is most readily read as a digital tool, one in which its ephemeral and virtual status are worked to render the day-to-day, mundane happenings, it is also an application that youth composers use to blur bifurcations between the real/virtual and of the past/present.

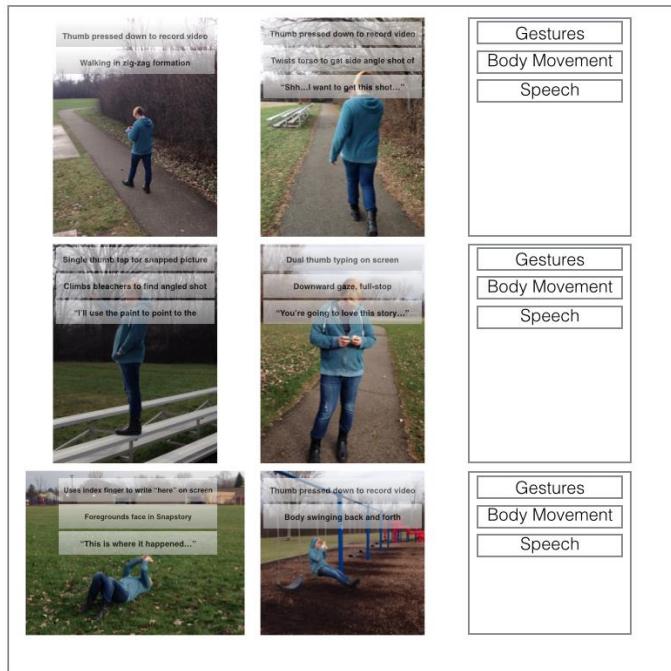


Figure 3. Excerpt from multimodal (inter)action analysis transcript. The 6-frame vignettes demonstrate a multimodal (inter)action analysis transcript that looks across gesture, body movement, and speech.

For Ben, using Snapchat during this protocol was less about his history with me as a researcher or his sister as sibling, than it was about his histories with the moment and the audience with whom he wanted to share it. Feelings across this spacetime traversal, ones which pushed Ben to touch feeling and create experience for his users, allows us to read the ways in which the digital screen is enfolded within spatio-

temporal scales of composing. Snapchat allowed Ben the opportunity to be an experience architect, one whose own processes of embodied composition facilitate the touching of time and the possibility as spatial storyteller.

### Spacetime Traversal 2. My Collective Life, My Consciousness: On Curating and Mapping Experience

If we abstract away from Ben’s larger snapstory and instead focus on the process and rationale for using Snapchat to compose experience, we begin to see how he uses the application to curate and map, virtually, his experience. Prior to commencing the protocol, Ben opened up a parallel digital application on his iPhone, Map My Walk. Map My Walk is a physical fitness application that charts steps, distance, and time. For Ben, the Map My Walk application houses a feature that Snapchat does not, a global positioning system (GPS). In an effort to document the actual trail of his thoughts and narrative, Ben charts where his snapstory takes him. Unlike many of the other youth users whom I observed in their Snapchat use and composing, Ben was an outlier. He felt he needed to map this process as it both captured the amount of time he spent curating the experience as well as the distance he traversed to create it (see Figure 4).

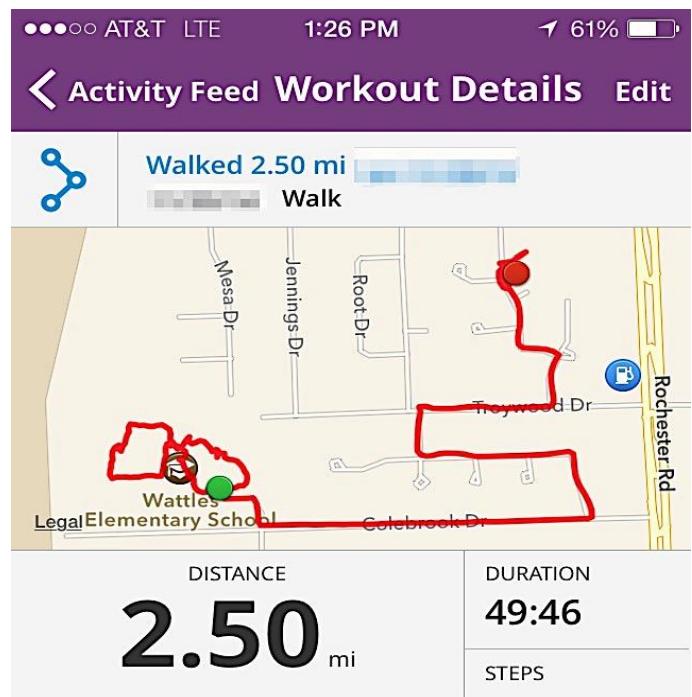


Figure 4. Ben’s Map My Walk map.

Ben uses the Map My Walk map to chart the geographic particulars of his snapstory. Because Ben was the sole participant whose interest in mapping his narrative led him to visually and digitally track it, I worked to better understand the particulars of this snapstory's trajectory and situation. As documented in Figure 3, the protocol itself lasted over 49 minutes and we traveled over two and a half miles together. After our return, Ben and I sat down and decided to segment and chart his narrative together. Using the Map My Walk map as a mentor-text, Ben and I used Google Earth to stitch the track that his narrative took. We then used the Google Earth maps to highlight the layered spatial stories that occurred across spacetime traversals (see Figure 5). For Ben, Snapchat allowed him to curate his "collective life" and document his "consciousness."

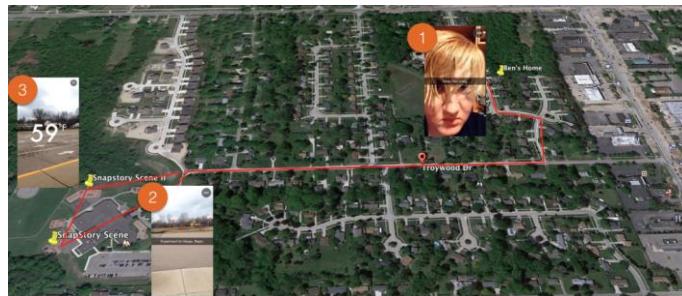


Figure 5. Google Earth map and Snap moments highlighting spatial stories.

Plotting, tracing, and stitching together the overarching narratives and spatial stories that took place across Ben's snapstory allowed for us to have an in-depth discussion while uncovering why Snapchat was the tool of primacy for Ben. As we used Google Earth to map the various folds of narrative embedded within the longer snapstory, Ben elaborated on his composing process.

Jon: Why is Snapchat your primary mode for writing?

Ben: I like it. It is extremely informal. People are more likely to respond because you can't just get the pop-up and see what it is and ignore it. You have to open it. You have to hold it down. You don't read, you see. I will know if you read it. I like that. Honestly, it is

the informality that makes it easier to do a lot more things.

Rather than text, instant messaging, or microblogging across venues of social media, Ben prefers Snapchat given its focus on the ephemeral and visual. This visual turn could be seen as indicative of what Verhoeff (2012) has called the *spatio-visual* or *navigational turn* insofar as its larger lineage has been traced across the visual (Mitchell, 1994) and spatial (Soja, 1996), which then evolved into a piqued interest and emphasis on mobility (Urry, 2007). For Ben, snapping is about curating an experience, collecting moments through visual frames to tell a moment, or perhaps to experience a rememory. When asked what the affordances of composing with Snapchat were, Ben replied:

It is like being with someone for that day. It is very intimate. When you see that snap, only a small group can see that snap. I get to feel like I am with them, even when I am not. People who I don't care about, or who I don't want to share that moment with, they don't get to know. It's a memory for a small collective, an experience we have together.

Thus, Snapchat, through its array of snapped selfies, screenshots, and visual ecologies, is a storied assessment of experience. Users curate images, video, and text and link them semantically to provide an array of experiences to not only relive them but also to document and stream them for a small collective.

**Affective intensities and curating personal history/ies; or snapping as art.** The array of spatial stories Ben tells in this particular snapstory are affectively charged, propelling him to document certain experiences over others. In the first story, the one that he titles "My First Kiss," Ben relives and redocuments a snapstory he had previously created. I showed initial interest in this story given its theme and content surrounding identity. In a 24-frame narrative arc, Ben snaps a story that traces the histories of both the geographic and physical location of his elementary school and of the particulars of the "moment" he shares (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Ben's Google Earth plot of spatial Story 1.

Ben commences the narrative by opening with a horizontal turned vertical frame snap with text overlaying his elementary school. This, both visually and textually, sets the audience to be a receiver of “going back in time” with Ben. As a narrative time traveler, Ben continues this thread by then streaming several frames that document the highlighted “blank space” of a history he can no longer represent. For example, in Frame 2 of Figure 6, Ben highlights an area just adjacent to his head where he uses Snap’s paint feature to highlight the area where his previous love interest laid his head. By drawing the audience into landscapes of times past, Ben provides a scenario that is affectively charged. The first spatial story then continues with Ben traversing the playground to sit on the swings. In Frame 3 of Figure 6, we see a still action frame of a 10-second video where Ben records himself swinging. Backdropped by the squeaking of the swing’s chain and the rush of wind on this autumn day, Ben propels his audience to feel his own navigation across spacetime. Closing out this first snapstory is a still photo frame of a painted United States map with Michigan hollowed out. Using the text feature, he types, “Why’s my state hollowed out?” He closes this first spatial story, perhaps unnoticeingly, by indexing his location both physically, with the hollowed map and text indexing him as a Michigan resident, but also temporally as he asks viewers to “go back” with him.

As a narrative time traveler and as a spatial storyteller, Ben’s larger goal as a composer is to, as he says, “create art.” As we stitched together frames of his overlapping spatial stories, Ben discusses his own strategies of being a Snap artist:

It’s like art. I know of one example. When I was in San Diego, I saw these artists and

they do these giant sand sculptures with various colors of sand. It’s intricate. It’s beautiful. They are masterpieces, every single one. Then, just like that, they let the wind blow it away. That is what is so beautiful about it [Snapchat]. It is so temporary.

Curating and stitching together frames to compose an embodied experience is like art for Ben. As he suggests, Snapchat’s ephemerality and modes for design afford him the ability to compose and share his “collective life” and consciousness. Composing with Snapchat, however, like Ben contends, is ephemeral. Often, these narrative cartographers are like the sand he cites, blown not by wind but by the affective intensities that incite coinciding spatial stories to be taken up, composed, and felt.

### Spacetime Traversal 3. Like Sand Sculptures Blown Away in the Wind: Materiality, Felt Space, and Participating in Lizette’s Childhood

As I stated earlier, Ben’s Snapstory and the composing *in situ* protocol did not go as expected. What we set out to accomplish was a Snapstory that, like the one he shared some weeks previous, replicated and documented the curated experience of his first kiss. During this data session, however, Lizette, Ben’s older sister, accompanied us on our journey. Usually walking some few feet behind and/or asking why I was interested in Snapchat as a mechanism for writing, Lizette became a focal unit of analysis for Ben as his snapstory progressed (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Ben’s stitching together of spatial Story 2.

As noted in Figure 6, jumping off the swings, Ben traversed the playground pavement to snap a photo of the hollowed state of Michigan that lines the blacktop. Some 40 feet away, across the pavement and down into a wood-chipped jungle gym, Ben observed Lizette playing on the monkey bars. “It’s hot lava!” screams Lizette. Lifting his phone, Ben aims the iPhone camera lens to snap Lizette in action. “Is this ok?” Ben inquires of me. I highlight this interaction as it aptly illuminates the affective intensities and material realities that push and pull Ben to compose overlapping spatial stories. In this concluding findings section, I follow these traces and resonances of Ben’s composing as a way to document and detail the material “felt” spaces he composes in a spatial story he calls, “Lizette’s inner child.”

As Ben rushed over to Lizette, she quickly tip-toed her way across a balance beam, acting as if she could not touch the wood chips below as the so-called “hot lava” would burn her. Climbing up and across the monkey bars, Lizette continues to meander the lava terrain. Immediately, Ben starts snapping photos, taking videos, and providing textual dialogue to a secondary spatial story. For the next 90 seconds, Ben follows Lizette and documents her “reliving” her childhood (for examples see Figures 8, 9, and 10).



Figure 8. “Success.”



Figure 9. Lizette traverses the “lava.”

In alignment with feeling his own youth and past experiences, Ben traces and embodies Lizette by tracing the recess game she played in her early youth. Marking her “success,” following her path while snapping her process, and then indexing these moments as “Lizette finding her inner child,” the affective intensities and shared histories of Lizette arriving on the scene reoriented Ben’s snap composition. Adding Lizette into the mix, the throwntogetherness of the playground space and place transformed into an assemblage of felt histories. The sand sculptures, if we use Ben’s words, of the aims and goals of the composition were blown away, revised to tell an affective moment of youth and to relive the childhood imaginary of recess.

As Lizette finds herself successful in navigating the “hot lava,” Ben closes the story in a third refrain that I call “feeling memory,” the final spatial story. For Ben, as a narrative cartographer, it was not necessarily the snapstory (the product) that he felt warranted close inspection. In fact, even writing about it and documenting it in static screenshot frames seems inauthentic. For Ben, Lizette, and me, it was the shared experience, felt histories, and material navigation across the place and space of school that carries most resonance. For us, it was in the moment and process of navigating the topographies and traversals of spatial stories that carried the most

affective weight. While Ben felt as if he contaminated the research scene by following Lizette and her moment of felt history, the third traversal and spatial story works to bookend the group experience.

Closing the story, we as a collective returned to the parking lot. Wanting to document “every moment,” Ben swipes his thumb to the right to capture the temperature. His final frame then takes a picture of Lizette’s car and closes the story with a text box that reads, “experiment over.” As Lizette started her car and drove off, leaving Ben and me to walk the one-mile return trip, Ben laughed and said, “well that was a tale to tell.” The tale that Ben refers to cannot be viewed as a triad of narratives that counter one another but an assemblage of the digital, physical, and geographic materiality that documents how time is felt in the embodied composing process/experience of composing with mobile media.



Figure 10. “Finding her inner child”

### Discussion

By highlighting a constellation of rich points to illuminate the affective feelings and touching of time mediated by youth mobile composing, this article

moves away from previous accounts of youth writing through mobile media which focus solely on design. Utilizing an elastic literacies perspective allowed us to nuance the topographies of a young person navigating the so-called situative and networked turns in literacy research and practice. Illustrated in the findings/traversals sections, the expanded heuristic of elastic literacies helps account for the practices and intensities across activity, spacetime, and affect/sensation. These paths of complementarity textured the spatial stories we navigated and traversed through. In this final section, I describe how my emergent analysis of Ben’s snapstory informs theorizations and intersections concerning embodiment, narrative cartography, and youth language and literacy studies.

Taking heed of what Lewis and del Valle (2009) have identified as the third wave of literacy and identity research, microanalysis helped illuminate how identity is “hybrid, metadiscursive, and spatial” (p. 316) for Ben. Through Ben’s composing process and snapstory, we are able to attend to the multi-spatial and cross-temporal performances of selves across spacetime traversals. As mobile technologies continue to infiltrate youth spaces, I suggest we continue to describe and explore how, through the stretches of selves and emergent experiences, youth are not solely seeing themselves through the screen but rather mediating their construction of motility across spacetime.

Apart from experience, identities, and spacetime, the felt affect and touch of time is another avenue to continue exploring in multimodal youth composing. Multimodal (inter)action analysis helped account for the ways in which Ben physically (through touch, swipe, gesture, and gaze) composed a narrative that was not only overlapping across histories of access and participation but enfolded in spacetime as new bodies emerged on the scene. As an embodied form of composition, we saw how the so-called contamination of the research scene, the inclusion of his older sister Lizette, invited new possibilities and affective intensities for embodied composing. In sum, Lizette became both an object and subject that Ben built context around. Lizette’s riptide effect across spacetime contributed to Ben’s ongoing story and rememory. For Ben, the “tale to tell” was not the

documented product but the shared event that we encountered in the nexus and navigation of practice.

If we abstract away from Ben's snapstory and affective experience, two themes come to fruition when considering youth mobile composing and its relation to temporal travel: the affective paths of embodied design and the navigation of emerging techtual landscapes. If we consider how Ben's moment-to-moment unfolding signals a turn in the field, then we must, as language and literacy researchers, take heed of what an elastic orientation to our work may suggest.

Literacies are rhizomatic. Unbounded, the meanderings of youth composing when left to unfold, stretch across a multitude of planes to chart the affective experience. We would do well to remind ourselves of this as we try to constrain the act and art of composing in schools. Unfortunately, the boundaries of the institution are not as permeable as these time traveling spatial stories. Youth composition is often handcuffed to the do-s and don'ts disciplined by form.

Apart from these affective dimensions across spacetime, I now want to turn towards scale and consider the emergence of new techtual landscapes that literacy in the era of the mobile screen is producing. As a literacy educator whose interest in critical geography, writing in digital environments, and technology has taken him to trace youth composing across a variety of literacy "sittings" and geographies, I am still struck by the cemented paradigm of technological integration. I fear the text-centrism of the New London Group (1996) and multiliteracies framework is collapsing into tech-centrism in the age of the Internet. Although youth are traversing new geographies and communicative

landscapes in their role as narrative cartographers, we would do well to remind ourselves that technology is but a tool and a lens, not a form or way of life. The iPhone was not affectively charged or stretched toward telling a secondary sedimented story on top of the first, but Ben was.

Although issues of space, time, and affect crystallized in an out-of-school context for Ben, they are paramount constructs that mediate school spaces and literacy classrooms in particular. While I am apprehensive in suggesting utility for language and literacy educators to potentially co-opt the mobile media application Snapchat for pedagogical purposes, I do see its larger rhetorical affordances and potential

for classroom and narrative analyses. As Beach, Anson, Kastman Breuch, and Reynolds (2014) suggest, Snapchat may be used to engage students in "photojournalism or digital storytelling" highlighting how a "certain event, topic, or issue in the school or community" (p. 167) can be shared with peers. Similarly, and as Ben's narrative suggests, Snapchat can also be used to have students document experiences, highlighting how the

particulars of composing (i.e., audience, voice, ethos, etc.) are orchestrated in the design of networked and multimodal selves. Recent scholarship on multimodality, video production, and arts-based inquiry articulate how the interperformativity across modes make visible a range of affiliations, self-reflexivity, and aesthetic choices of the composer (Doerr-Stevens, 2015; DeJaynes, 2015). Mobile media applications offer the literacy educator a window into the types of networked composing young people use in to engage audiences and explore differences.

Similarly, educators may find it worthwhile to have students virtually map the particulars and trade

routes of their literacy and composing practices to better illuminate the dimensions of spatiality in their writing. Pennell (2014), for example, had first year writing students interrogate the spatio-temporal dimensions of literacy acquisition and sponsorship by tagging, tracing, and charting the spatial locations of literacy sponsorship. For Pennell, the act of having students map their literacy sponsors helped develop an “infrastructural framework, a framework that accounts for the when and where of one’s literacy experiences” (Pennell, 2014, pp. 59-60). As our contemporary time becomes marked as an age wherein metal meets flesh, and the mobile devices we carry track, count, measure, and observe us, we should have students inquire not only about the navigation of social space, but the scale of social space and the elastic stretches it asks us to consider in the day-to-day moments of sensation and movement.

### Conclusion

By examining the literacy traces of youth mobile composing *in situ*, educators and researchers alike may account for the rhetorical and embodied affordances youth employ as they stitch together

convergent narratives to produce and embody their visions, voices, and experiences. By accounting for the rich opportunities and nuanced processes of composing via Snapchat, I advocate for a continued critical engagement with a composition that encourages expressive possibilities and potentials for meaning making across space. In an effort to better understand the intersections of language and literacy studies across an array of contexts, this article argues that we must first, as Massey (2005) has asserted, attend to the felt experiences of coping with and telling the “ongoing stories” (p. 126) of the everyday. Tracing affective experiences and spatial stories shed light on the potential in documenting the nomadic narratives and embodied temporal tales of the everyday. For these narratives, stories of felt history and rememory provide a window not into the micro-politics of the literacy classroom but a glimpse into the emergence of embodied practices of youth composing with mobile media. These rhizomatic narratives may not provide potential for or an idealism about literacy in school-sanctioned spaces, but they may very well be those that make use feel and stretch us towards composing and designing a better tomorrow.

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